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ABSTRACT

The following intergenerational literacy programs are described in this document: (1) a Boston University program that provides about 112 hours of training for work-study students who then work as tutors for adults; (2) a program that uses the paired reading technique to involve parents in the development of their children's reading in the United Kingdom; (3) the Penn State Adult Literacy Courseware Project, which uses the "whole word approach" to reach its goal of teaching 1,000 functional and high frequency words to adult beginning readers; (4) a program in which parents and their children read and discuss children's literature; and (5) the Motheread program in Durham, North Carolina, in which female prisoners are prepared for their roles as mothers upon their release. A survey of 30 university connected individuals designed to find out whether they enjoyed reading and whom they credit with instilling their love or dislike of reading is also discussed. It is concluded that literacy professionals should be encouraged to consider using intergenerational programs, particularly because parents' motivation to help their children is generally strong. Finally, it is suggested that program successes and failures be shared among educators, that better training be provided for those serving as tutors, and that both tutors and tutees voice their specific needs. A nine-item bibliography is included. (CML)

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Intergenerational Literacy Programs Discussed

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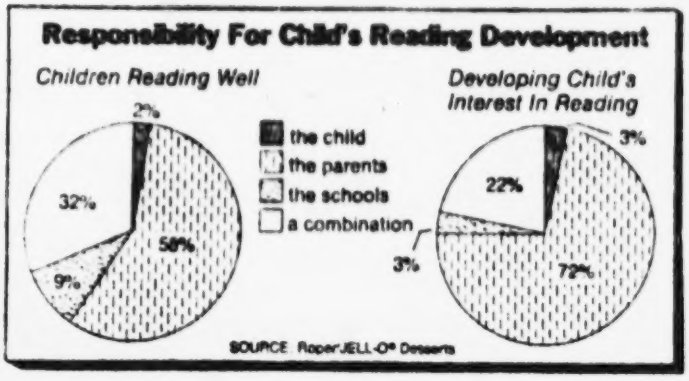
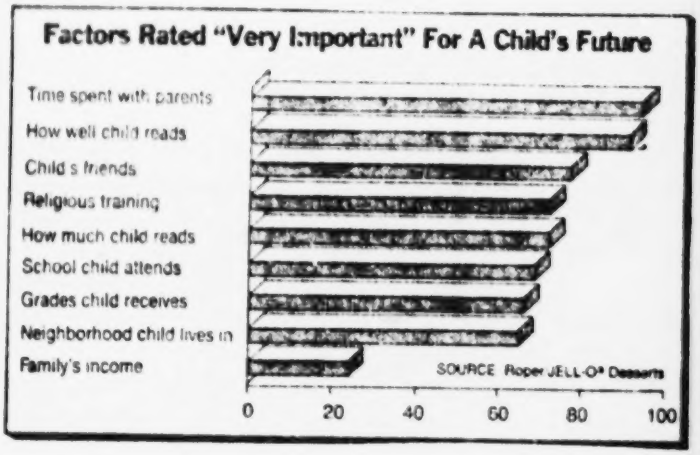
Intergenerational Literacy Programs Discussed

In the June 1, 1988 issue of Education Week, the results of a poll of 1000 parents of children ages 3 to 14 were reported by Robert Rothman (8). The national survey by the Roper polling firm was commissioned by officials of Jell-O-Desserts. It found that parents consider themselves primarily responsible for instilling in their children a love for reading by reading to them and helping them to develop reading interests and skills. The study corroborated earlier research findings that parents who read themselves and who read to their children are more likely to foster an interest in and a liking for reading. One chart below shows the responsibility for a child's reading development as determined by the survey. The second chart shows factors very important for a child's future. Obviously, the parents think of reading ability as a major determinant of a child's chances for success in life.





Nickse, R.S., Speicher, A.M. and Buchek, P.C. (6) have offered information on a Federally funded program at Boston University in which an intergenerational approach to adult literacy instruction was studied. They reported that 40% of the thirty parents (study subjects) participating in the program gave "helping their children" as a reason for enrolling, and 40% gave "improvement of their own reading and writing skills." The parents were recruited from a targeted pool; they were those with children in Chapter I programs (Federally funded).

The tutors (work-study students) in the Boston program are well trained. They receive about 112 hours of training by professionals in reading and adult education. This is considerably more training than many volunteers receive. Experience has taught that this is critical as many volunteers have been heard to exclaim from time to time, "I just don't know what to do with my student!" As a result, some tutors have given up, and tutees have dropped out because they haven't felt as if they were accomplishing anything either. As pointed out, the Boston project involves a great diversity in educational and ethnic backgrounds, in different socio-economic levels, etc. and though caring is important, it must not be, as Nickse et al. report, "confused with the effects of skilled professional reading instruction."

It is encouraging to note that tutors demonstrate to parents the advantage of taking their children to libraries, museums, on field trips, etc. Not only can this strengthen the parent-child relationship, but it is believed to provide a background for

reading enjoyment. It is felt that if one brings nothing to a page, one usually gets little, if anything, meaningful and satisfying from it.

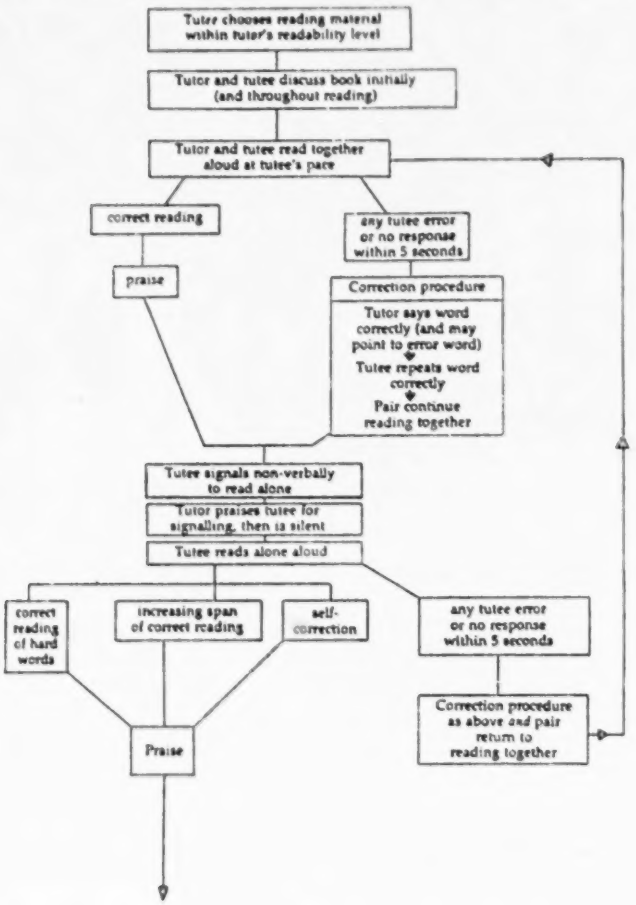
The Paired Reading technique used in the United Kingdom is another program aimed at involving parents in the development of their children's reading ability. It is reported that the program has met with considerable success with a very wide range of target children. Scoble, J., Topping, K. and Wigglesworth, C. (9) explain some of its features.

In this program the children are encouraged to choose their own reading material which, of course, must be that in which the tutor has some competence. In addition tutees are asked to bring along to the initial training meeting someone they met frequently who could help them 5 minutes, 5 days a week for six weeks.

Choosing their own material and receiving training along with their tutors probably helps to overcome two deterrents often encountered: disinterest on the part of the tutee and friction between him/her and the tutor.

A graphic outline of the procedure used in Paired Reading follows:

Paired Reading procedure


Tutee chooses reading material within tutor's readability level
Tutor and tutee discuss book initially (and throughout reading)
Tutor and tutee read together aloud at tutee's pace
correct reading
any tutee error or no response within 5 seconds
praise
Correction procedure
Tutor says word correctly (and may point to error word)
Tutee repeats word correctly
Pair continue reading together
Tutee signals non-verbally to read alone
Tutor praises tutee for signalling, then is silent
Tutee reads alone aloud
correct reading of hard words
increasing span of correct reading
self-correction
any tutee error or no response within 5 seconds
Correction procedure as above and pair return to reading together
Praise

Scoble, Topping and Wigglesworth further explain that all pairs (tutee and tutor) are visited at home by one of the Adult Literacy Organizers. Problems are discussed and encouragement given. At the end of the initial intensive phase of the project, feedback is provided by project leaders who meet with the tutor and tutee.

Scoble, Topping and Wigglesworth state some advantages of using Paired Reading within a College of Further Education. For one thing, able students involved in Basic Skills courses can be used as tutors. However, they feel that Paired Reading has the potential to be deployed effectively in open community settings with volunteer tutors.

Some of the features of Paired Reading can be found in other approaches to reading, one of which is the Neurological Impress Method. Heckelman (3) describes it thus:

> The Neurological Impress Method (NIM) is a remedial reading method whereby the student and the instructor read aloud together in unison. The instructor leads the reading while a finger is slid along under the words of the sentence being read. Care is taken that the finger is precisely located where the word is being read. The instructor sits to the right side and to the rear of the student. The instructor's voice is directed toward the right ear of the learner. No corrections are made during or after the reading session.

Handel, R.D. and Goldsmith, C. (2) offer the following explanation of an interesting program using children's literature:

> Intergenerational reading uses a powerful motivational tool as an enjoyable instructional

> approach. The motivation is parents' concern for their children's welfare, a motivation similar to that which brings many low-literate parents into adult literacy programs (Heathington, 1987; Maclay and Askov, 1988: Smith-Burke, 1988). The instructional approach involves reading and discussing children's literature, classics and contemporary stories, picture books, poetry, and non-fiction books, often beautifully illustrated, dealing with science, history, or social issues -- books too seldom known or read in low-literate or low-income homes. With these nourishing and provocative books enjoyable experiences are provided for adult students who can then re-create those experiences at home with their children. Reading aloud, discussing books, and listening to stories are part of the experience.

Handel and Goldsmith explain that the intergenerational model originated in a community college. The students were parents or other relatives of children who were selected because they had failed a standardized reading test. It was noted that these young people were more concerned about their children's reading than they were about their own.

The success of the program led the authors to conclude that children's literature can contribute to the adult literacy curriculum. Of course, this is a "two-way street"; the contribution to the children is often a life-long love for reading. This was evident in a small random sampling done recently by this writer. An explanation follows:

Thirty people, connected with a university, in capacities ranging from student to service personnel, and in age from twelve to the early fifties, were approached and asked, "Do you enjoy reading beyond what is required of you? Whom do you credit with instilling (or failing to instill) in you the love of reading?"

Twenty-nine of the thirty, all selected at random, reported that they like to read and that they do read beyond what is required of them. This covers all the categories, student to service personnel, an age range from twelve (students in the Talent Identification Program) to the early fifties, the American born, members of the minority population, various ethnic groups, and various socioeconomic levels.

Twenty-one of the thirty credited their parents with instilling in them a love of reading; two credited their grandmothers; four, themselves; two, a combination of credit - parents and school; and only one gave entire credit to the school. (It is believed that his parents could neither read nor write).

It is generally known that children of parents whose literacy skills are of a low level are at an educational disadvantage. It is felt by some that intergenerational literacy programs might alleviate this condition. Maclay, C. and Askov, E.N. (4) report on an intergenerational project, the Penn State Adult Literacy Courseware project which was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Chapter I and Adult Basic Education Projects monies.

The courseware developed uses the "whole word" approach and some word-building activities in teaching 1000 functional and high frequency words to adult beginning readers, the goal being expanded word recognition for adult non-readers. There are several modules in the project, ranging from the first which is on computer usage to Module 6, a word-processing module which allows students to use the words they are learning in writing

activities.

The authors seem to feel that a parent's description of the program speaks well of its worth. The parent said, "I never read to my kid. I'm not quite ready yet. But, now I think I'll try it real soon."

An important point made by the authors and sometimes overlooked by program planners is that some parents and their children don't work too well together. The authors admitted that though the models that involved the children proved very successful, the parents, in some cases, were "very uncomfortable having their child/children present."

In one of his columns entitled "Treat Illiteracy as a Family Disease," William Raspberry (7), a syndicated columnist, expressed his feeling as to how to combat illiteracy.

He began his column with a well-known quote, "Home is a child's first school; the parent is the child's first teacher; and reading is the child's first subject." He feels that the quote is the idea behind the recently-launched Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. Hopefully, the Foundation will encourage programs in which illiterate parents can learn along with their children and thus break the illiteracy cycle.

Raspberry quoted from Economic Development, by John Kenneth Galbraith: "No improvement is possible with unimproved people. There is a certain sterility in economic monuments that stand alone in a sea of illiteracy. Conquest of illiteracy comes first." He feels sure that Barbara Bush would agree with this.

Certainly the First Lady's interest in eradicating illiteracy should encourage many others to "join the cause."

It is being realized by more and more people that involving parents in literacy programs and expanding the programs to include all segments of society is a means of preventing illiteracy from passing to each succeeding generation. David Newton (5) explains "Motheread" and its proposed expansion which the Durham County Literacy Council will put into effect late this summer.

> "Motheread" began as a pilot program in N.C. Correctional Center for women in Raleigh in January 1988. The program prepared inmates for their role as mothers upon release and helped alleviate a literacy problem that sees one in five adults in the United States unable to read.
>
> From its infancy two years ago "Motheread" this year will be taught in three women's prisons, in child-care centers in Wake County, at Halifax County Library and at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Coalition for Literacy, in addition to its use in Durham public housing projects and day-care centers.

In each of the intergenerational programs herein described, there are some practices which would be questioned by some educators. By the same token, there are some practices which would be commended. These differences can give those who would launch literacy programs a great advantage; it can stimulate their thinking to choose, for their tutees, the very best practices -- those based on the uniqueness of the tutees: their learning styles, their life styles, their goals, their capabilities, etc.

There are those who feel quite strongly that the existing adult literacy programs could be greatly improved if instructional methods were based on research in which adult models are used.

They feel that many of the existing adult reading programs are based on the theory of how children learn, a theory of pedagogy, and ignore the theory of androgogy, the science of how adults learn.

Fay F. Bowren (1) who teaches reading education at Illinois State University in Normal and who is also a consultant on adult literacy projects for the Illinois Secretary of State Office and the Illinois State Board of Education, is one who seems to feel strongly about this. She says, "When educators can begin to build materials, programs, and instructional methods specifically based on adult research models and androgogical principles rather than modifying the strategies which are useful in the education of children, adult basic education will take a giant step forward."

It is felt that Bowren's position provides food for thought for both researchers and educators, and it seems to show a need for better communication between researchers and educators. It certainly should be encouraging to those in charge of adult literacy programs that there are always new ideas for possibly improving their existing programs.

Conclusions

It is concluded that intergenerational literacy programs should be given careful consideration, as parents' concern for their children is a strong motivational tool for use as an instructional approach. It is further concluded that the designers of the programs should be aware of the pitfalls as well as the

advantages. In the examples, herein shared, some of the educational practices might be questioned and others commended. The concerned designer can accept, reject and add his/her own ideas as he/she designs a program based on the uniqueness of the subjects concerned.

Implications

Adult literacy programs should be designed in accordance with the uniqueness of the adults to be served. No one program is good for all students.

Successes and failures in program should be shared among educators.

There should be greater communication between researchers and educators.

In many cases there should be better initial training of tutors and continuous in-service training by skilled professional reading instructors.

Both tutors and tutees should voice their specific needs, as these vary with the different individuals.

Literacy programs should be expanded to include all segments of society.

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